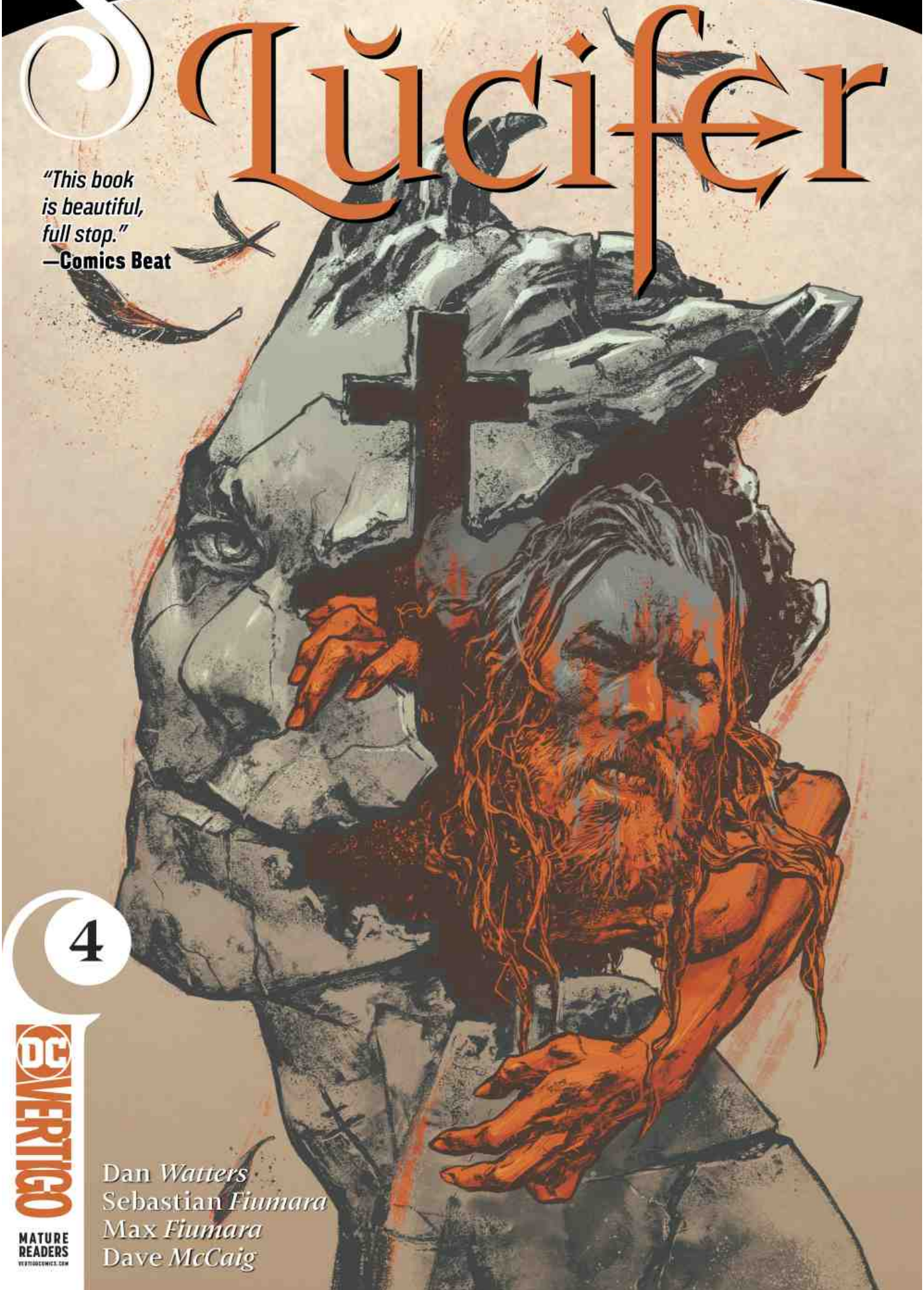
THE SANDMAN ✦ UNIVERSE

Lucifer

"This book is beautiful, full stop."
—Comics Beat



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DC VERTIGO

MATURE READERS
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Dan *Watters*
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Max *Fiumara*
Dave *McCaig*

SHE DIED OVER FIVE HUNDRED YEARS AGO.

THE INTERIM YEARS WERE OF COOL OBLIVION--UNTROUBLED AND UNBURDENED.

AN ABYSS OF PERFECT STILLNESS, UNKNOWN AND IMPERCEIVABLE TO THE LIVING.

IN THIS SILENCE SHE HAD FORGOTTEN HER NAME, AND WHAT IT HAD BEEN TO HAVE ONE.

IT HAD BEEN BETTER THAT WAY.

SHE HAD FORGOTTEN PAIN AND LONELINESS, AND HOW IT FELT TO BE BETRAYED. ALL THE THINGS THAT THE LIVING KNOW.

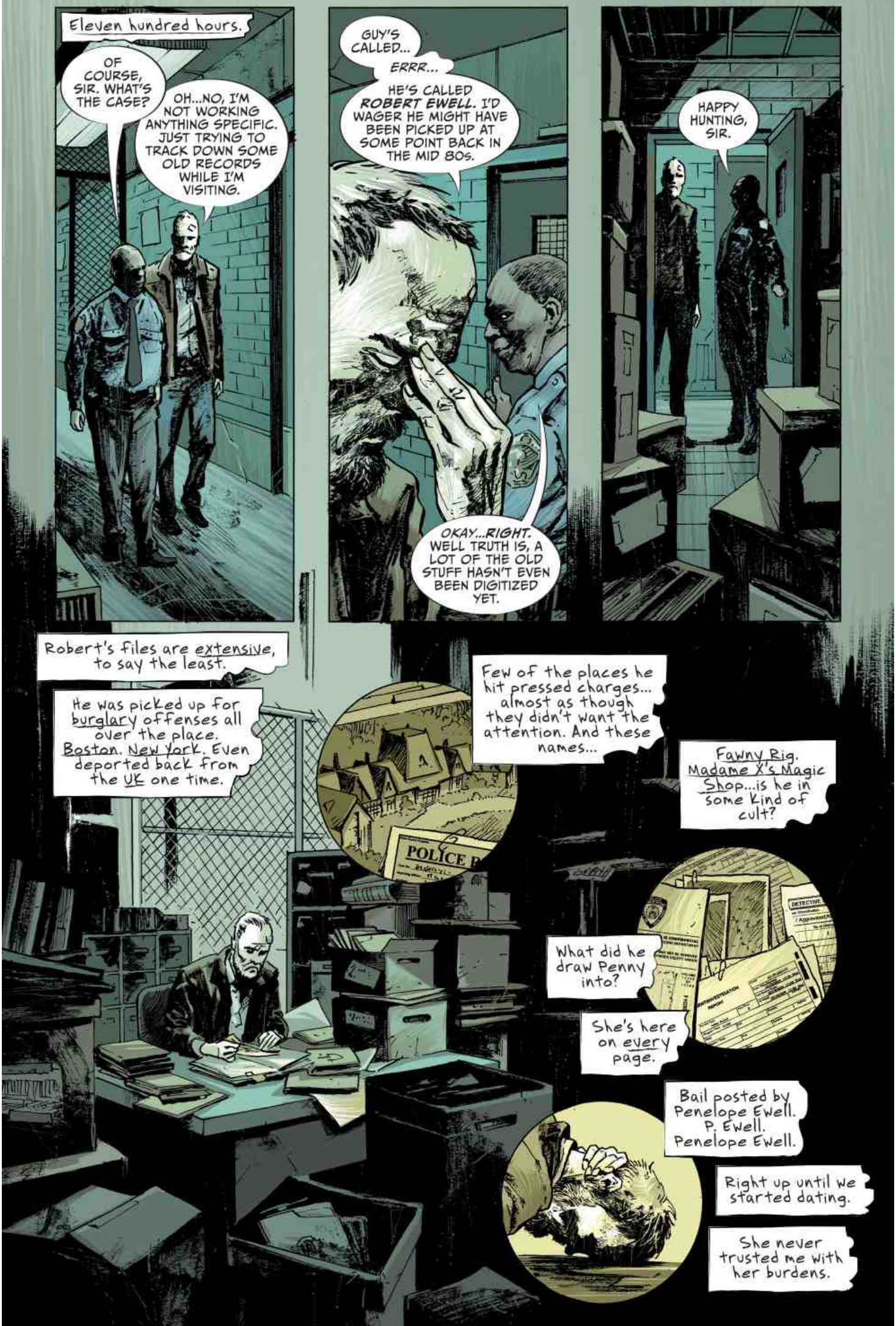
AND THEN THEY CAME--INTRUDERS INTO HER SOLITUDE, BREACHERS OF THE PEACE--AND SHE FORGOT IT HAD EVER BEEN SILENT AT ALL.

SHE HAS FINALLY REALIZED ALL OF THIS ON DISCOVERING A BOOK OF PROPHECY WRITTEN BY THE MORTAL WILLIAM BLAKE, WHICH TELLS THE STORY OF THIS FORSAKEN PLACE.

IT TELLS THE STORY OF THE ONE WHO WOULD NOT LET HER REST--WHO MEANT TO FORCE HER TO LIVE AGAIN, WHETHER SHE WISHED TO OR NOT.

SHE REMEMBERED THAT HER NAME IS SYCORAX. AND SHE REMEMBERS THAT...

"...OF COURSE IT'S ALL LUCIFER'S FAULT."
Ten hundred hours. I woke up on the floor of my motel room, fully dressed.
There was blood in my mouth. I'd bitten my tongue.
Penny never had seizure symptoms with her brain tumor.
So perhaps mine is not quite identical after all.
Perhaps I was wrong to believe I had inherited it from her.
Last night seems like a nightmare, and maybe some of it was.
I can't trust my eyes-- can't trust my mind-- anymore, to distinguish fever dream from reality.
I am going to start keeping this journal hourly, so I can separate what I truly see from what's created by hostile matter pressing against my cortex.
Robert is coming here tonight at six. By then I must be able to decipher lies from truth.
I must search for patterns and continuity among my own thoughts, while I still have them.
I must behave as a detective again.
POLICE


Eleven hundred hours.
OF COURSE, SIR. WHAT'S THE CASE?
OH...NO, I'M NOT WORKING ANYTHING SPECIFIC. JUST TRYING TO TRACK DOWN SOME OLD RECORDS WHILE I'M VISITING.
GUY'S CALLED...
ERRR...
HE'S CALLED ROBERT EWELL. I'D WAGER HE MIGHT HAVE BEEN PICKED UP AT SOME POINT BACK IN THE MID 80s.
OKAY...RIGHT. WELL TRUTH IS, A LOT OF THE OLD STUFF HASN'T EVEN BEEN DIGITIZED YET.
HAPPY HUNTING, SIR.
Robert's files are extensive, to say the least.
He was picked up for burglary offenses all over the place. Boston. New York. Even deported back from the UK one time.
Few of the places he hit pressed charges... almost as though they didn't want the attention. And these names...
Fawny Rig. Madame X's Magic Shop...is he in some kind of cult?
What did he draw Penny into?
She's here on every page.
Bail posted by Penelope Ewell. P. Ewell. Penelope Ewell.
Right up until we started dating.
She never trusted me with her burdens.

I've been casting my mind back through thirty happy years, searching for any clue... were the signs there and I missed them?
Perhaps I didn't want to see them.
It's getting so hard to think.
So hard to remember...
DAILY BEAST

PICK UP!
GODDAMN IT, PICK UP!
KNK KNK
LUCIFER?
LUCIFER IS THAT YOU?
I SWEAR TO YOU, FOR WHAT YOU HAVE DONE TO ME--
FORGIVE US!
FORGIVE US, DEAR MOTHER SYCORAX, WE DID NOT REMEMBER IT WAS YOU.
WHAT DO YOU WANT?
ONLY TO PROTECT YOU!
THAT IS OUR SWORN ROLE, AND YET WE FORGOT IT.
THEN WE SAW THE STATUE, AND WE REMEMBERED. MOST BLESSED OF THE WITCHES.
MOST POWERFUL OF OUR KIND.
BELOVED OF THE MOON.
YOU REMEMBERED WHEN YOU SAW THE STATUE...?
OF COURSE.
YOU'LL HAVE A CUP OF TEA, PERHAPS?

Thirteen hundred hours. I lost an hour.
I think I am losing pieces of myself...
DUNNO, JUST SOMETHING OFF ABOUT HIM. LOOKED LIKE HE WAS TWEAKING OR SOME SHIT. JUST HAD A FEELING...
SO I CALLED THE LAPD, ANYWAY.
TURNS OUT THE POOR BASTARD'S GOT AN ACTIVE WARRANT ON HIM.
KILLED HIS WIFE IN A CAR CRASH, THEN SKIPPED TOWN.
I LEFT HIM IN THE ARCHIVES.
CAN'T IMAGINE THE POOR BASTARD'LL PUT UP MUCH OF A FIGHT.
...and my investigation faces further complications.

Eighteen hundred hours.
Flicking back now, I appear to have lost some pages since earlier this afternoon.
But it doesn't matter. Keeping my thoughts in order on paper has worked. I can follow the through-thread.
Robert will be here soon. And I have found a way to get answers from him.
The man behind the motel desk sold me a pistol for a hundred bucks, no questions asked. The serial number's filed off.
Three days ago, I would have arrested him for that.
The whole world has changed in three days.
But I finally have a handle on things, and know what I need to do next.

JOHN... IS THAT YOU?
KLK
CHRIST, YOU LOOK LIKE SHIT. PUT THAT DOWN, LET ME--
WHAT DID YOU DRAG MY WIFE INTO, YOU BASTARD?
GET INSIDE.
THE M-MONSTERS IN THAT HOUSE... THAT RED EYE...
DID YOU BRING THEM WITH YOU?
LOOK, JOHN, I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU THINK YOU SAW...
BUT YOU PASSED OUT DRUNK OUTSIDE THE HALFWAY HOUSE.
I HAD TO SNEAK YOU OUT, OR ELSE THEY WERE GOING TO CALL THE COPS, AND I KNOW YOU'RE GOING THROUGH SOME SHIT.
I'VE BEEN WHERE YOU'VE BEEN. IF IT'S DRUGS-- DRINK--LET'S TALK.
NO. I SAW THEM--I SAW-- I SUH--I...
AND I KNOW IT! IT'S TRUE.
BECAUSE OF THIS.

I'VE BEEN DOUBTING MYSELF. DOUBTING MY SENSES AND SANITY, BUT YOU PUT *THIS* ON ME...
AND I'VE WORN IT THIS WHOLE TIME.
SOME OF YOUR OCCULT *BULLSHIT.* ONE THING I CAN PHYSICALLY HOLD AND KNOW THAT SOMETHING FUCKED UP IS GOING ON HERE.
NOW TELL ME THE TRUTH, OR I SWEAR TO CHRIST!
TELL ME THE TRUTH...
ARE YOU OKAY, JOHN?
DEAR ME.
HOW *UNFORTUNATE* FOR YOU.
"YOU SEE?"

THERE IS NO LONGER A TONE AT ALL.
BUT IT IS TO THE OUTSIDE?
TRULY TO THE OUTSIDE?
YES. AS BLAKE WROTE. THE PHONE CONNECTS ME TO THOSE WHO WEAR MY NAME.
BUT THAT WAS *US*.
THE *COVEN OF SYCORAX*. AND WE ARE HERE. WHEREVER HERE IS.
UNLESS...
THE *OTHER*.
THE ONE WHO FLED US.
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
IT STARTED ABOUT THIRTY YEARS AGO, WHEN THE MAN *EWELL* CAME TO *GATELY HOUSE*...

THAT WAS AN AWFUL SEIZURE YOU JUST HAD THERE, PAL.
I'M SURPRISED THERE'S *ANY* OF YOUR BRAIN LEFT TO WAKE UP.
WHA-- WHAT *ARE* YOU--?
WE'VE BARELY EVER KNOWN EACH OTHER, HAVE WE, JOHN?
ONLY THE ODD HELLO, AN AWKWARD FLICKER OF A SMILE THE FEW TIMES THE COVEN ALLOWED ME OUT.
WHEN THEY SENT ME TO *REMIND* YOUR DEAR *WIFE* THAT WE HADN'T FORGOTTEN HER.
THAT WE WERE *WAITING* FOR HER IN GATELY HOUSE.

UGH. SCUM IN THE KETTLE. SOMETHING'S IN THERE THAT SHOULDN'T BE.
HOW WERE YOU SO UNAWARE? DID YOU NEVER SEE HOW I MADE HER *SQUIRM* WITH GUILT? HOW THE SECRET *ATE* HER FROM *INSIDE?*
SOME LOVING HUSBAND.
SOME DETECTIVE.
HRRR...
YOU AND I BARELY KNOW EACH OTHER, YET YOU STILL KEEP APPEARING--AN INSIDIOUS UNINVITED GUEST.
LIKE AN INSECT IN MY WINE...
OR...*HEH.* LIKE A BRAIN TUMOR.
LIKE YOU DID THIRTY YEARS AGO, THE FIRST TIME I CAME TO GATELY HOUSE...

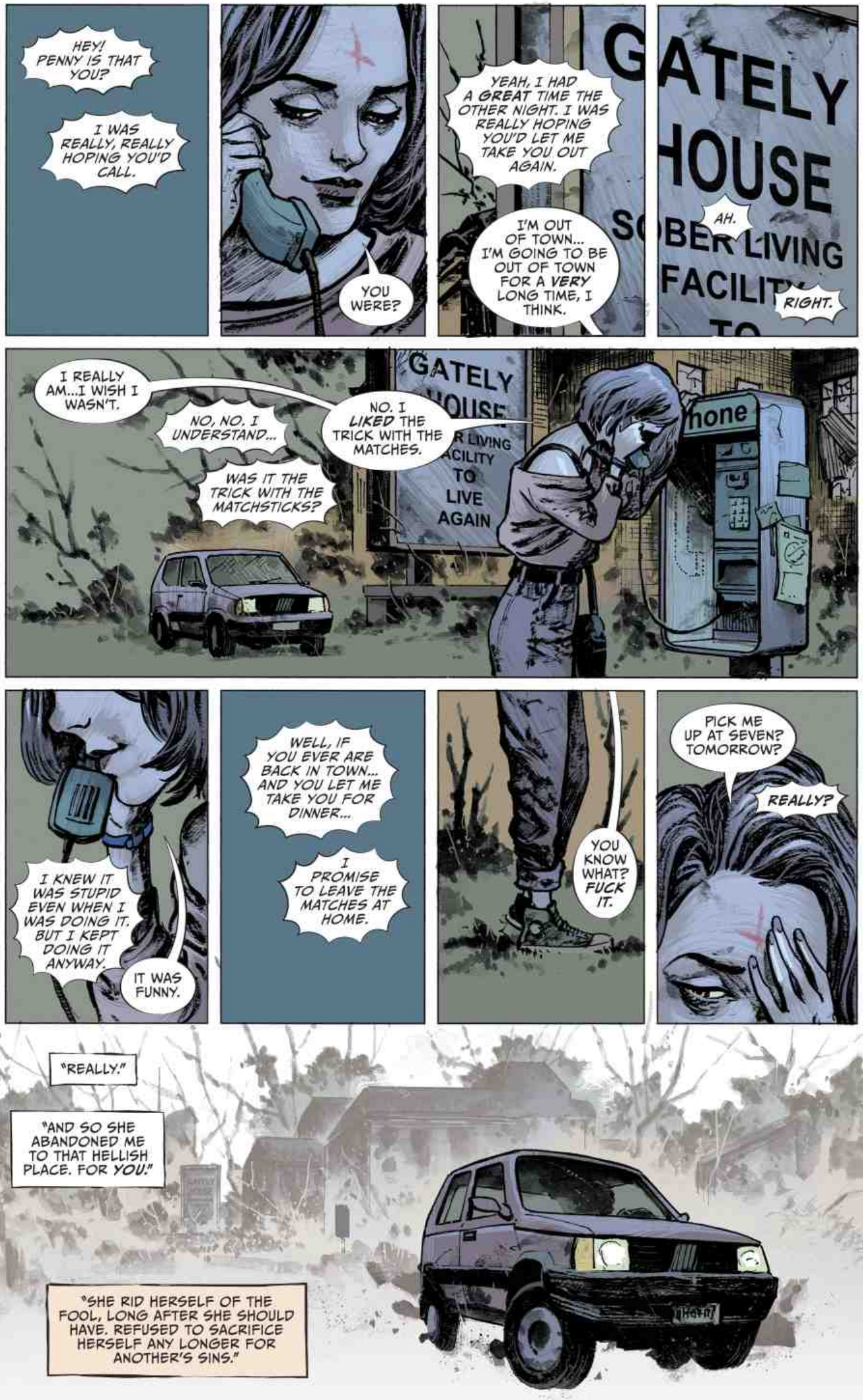
"HE WAS AN ADDICT AND A *THIEF*."
"I WAS A WARRIOR AGAINST THE FORCES OF DARKNESS."
"BUT HIS *ADDICTION* WAS TO *MAGIC*. HIS FAMILY'S BLOOD CONTAINED A RICH VEIN OF IT, OF WHICH HE'D RECEIVED A BARE CAPILLARY."
"I WAS BORN WITH THE CAPACITY TO BE A GREAT *MAGICIAN*. TO KEEP AT BAY HORRORS THAT THE WAKING WORLD DENIES EXIST. I NEEDED ONLY THE RIGHT TOOLS TO DO THIS WORK."
"HE THOUGHT MAGIC THE PATH TO AN EASY LIFE, AND SO WOULD STEAL IT--*LEECH* IT--WHEREVER HE COULD TRACK IT DOWN."
"GATELY HOUSE, THOUGH A TIGHTLY GUARDED MAGICKAL FORTRESS, CONTAINED THE MOST POWERFUL TOTEM MY SOURCES HAD EVER LED ME TO..."
"WE HAD RECENTLY ARRIVED IN THE NEW WORLD, AND THIS ROTTED PLACE SEEMED BELOW NOTICE ENOUGH THAT OUR PRECIOUS CHARGE WOULD BE SAFE THERE."
"BUT IT TURNED OUT TO BE TOO TIGHTLY GUARDED, EVEN FOR MY SKILLS."
"WE WOULD NOT HAVE THOUGHT A LEECH LIKE HIM FOOLHARDY ENOUGH TO TRY AND STEAL FROM US."
OH GOD, PLEASE-- DON'T HURT ME, *PLEASE*.
WHAT DO WE DO, *CRONE?*
IF WE LET HIM GO, WE'LL HAVE TO MOVE.
I DON'T WANT TO MOVE, I'M *TIRED* OF MOVING. I WANT TO STAY HERE A FEW DECADES. IT'S WARM.
AND WHAT IF HE PURSUES?
I WON'T-- CHRIST, I WON'T, I SWEAR!
PROBABLY EASIER JUST TO *KILL* HIM.
BESIDES, IMAGINE IF LUCIFER HEARD SOMEONE HAD EVEN GOTTEN THEIR HANDS ON *HER* BONES...
OH, IMAGINE INDEED.

ONE IMAGINES WE'D BE RATHER CROSS.
YOU'VE GOTTEN LAZY, COVEN, REDUCED TO THIS.
WE STILL SEEK OUR THIRD, LORD LUCIFER. WITHOUT HER, WE REMAIN WEAK.
AN EXCUSE, AND A POOR ONE.
YOU WANT A THIRD? ANOTHER WITCH?
LET ME BE THAT! I COULD BE THAT FOR YOU!
YOU COULD NOT, FOR A MYRIAD OF REASONS.
BUT I WOULD HAVE YOU KNOW THAT THE FIRST AMONG THEM IS NOTHING TO DO WITH YOUR SEX OR MANNER. AND EVERYTHING TO DO WITH YOUR WEAKNESS.
YOU TRIED TO STEAL FROM US. DO YOU UNDERSTAND THAT?
LOOK INTO OUR EYES AND SEE WHO WE ARE.
DO YOU THINK HE'S VERY ANGRY WITH US?
I DON'T KNOW. HOW LONG'S HE BEEN UP THERE WITH THAT MAN?
WHAT TIME IS IT NOW?
JUST GONE SEVEN.
OH.
THEN THREE AND A HALF DAYS.
KNK
KNK

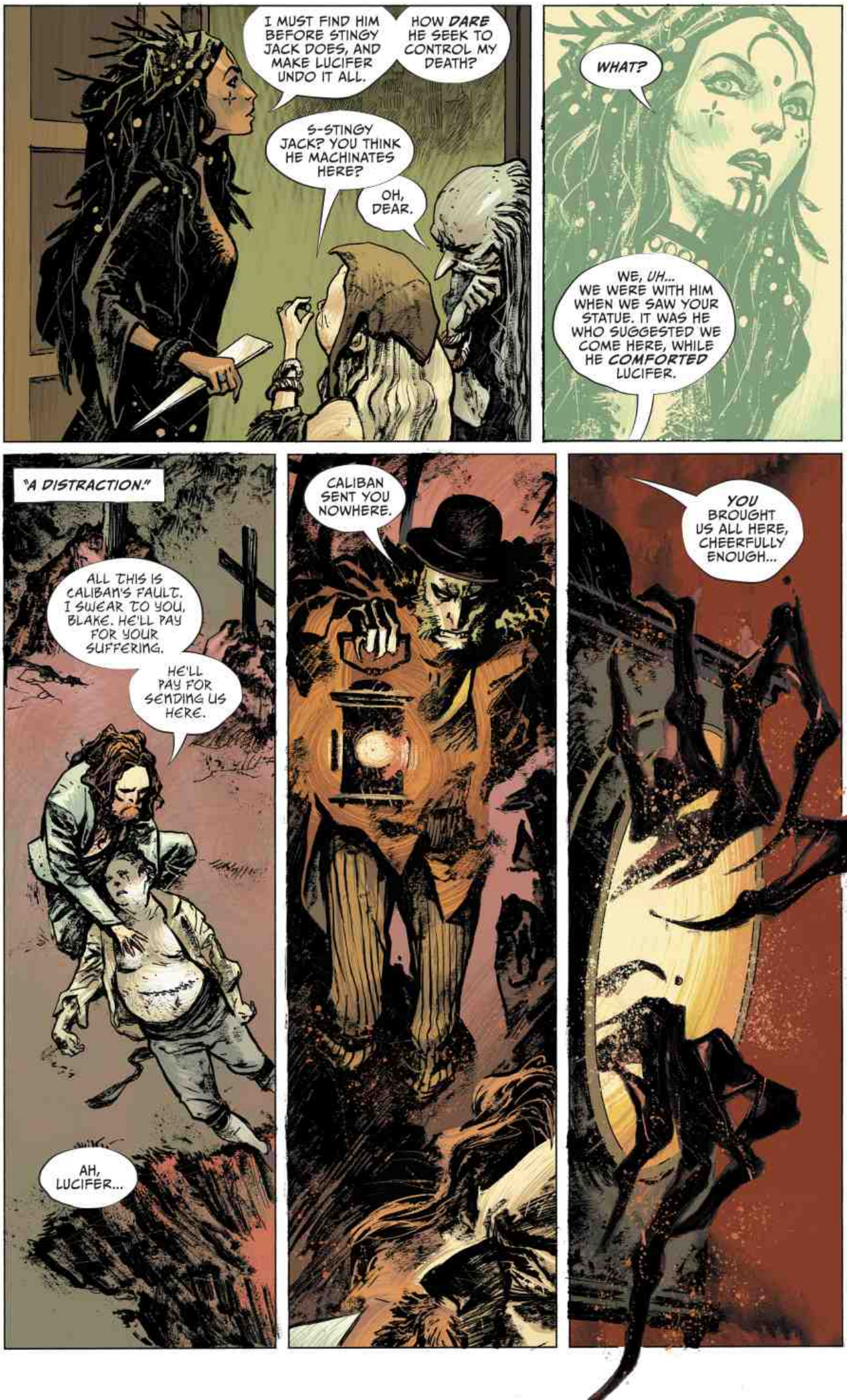
HELLO? I'M LOOKING FOR MY COUSIN...
"THE POOR GIRL HAD ARRIVED TO RESCUE THE WAYWARD ROBERT, YET AGAIN."
"PENELOPE BETRAYED ME."
"ONE LOOK AT HER TOLD US THAT SHE HAD ALL THE MAGIC THAT HER COUSIN WISHED FOR HIMSELF. SHE ALL BUT CRACKLED.
"WE KNEW ON SEEING HER THAT SHE'D MAKE A PERFECT THIRD."
"SHE CAME TO GLOAT, AND REAP THE SPOILS THAT I'D FOUND MYSELF."
COME IN, DEAR, COME IN.
LOOKING FOR YOUR COUSIN, YOU SAY?
YEAH, UH... I GOT THIS FEELING. I CAN'T QUITE EXPLAIN IT. THIS FEELING LIKE HE'S IN TROUBLE.
YOU'RE NOT A MOTHER, PERCHANCE?
WHAT? NO.
NEVER MIND, PLENTY OF TIME FOR THAT.
WHAT ARE YOU...LOOK, IS ROBERT HERE OR NOT?
WAIT. HE IS, ISN'T HE?
HE'S UPSTAIRS.
ROBERT!
OH, NO...I WOULDN'T...

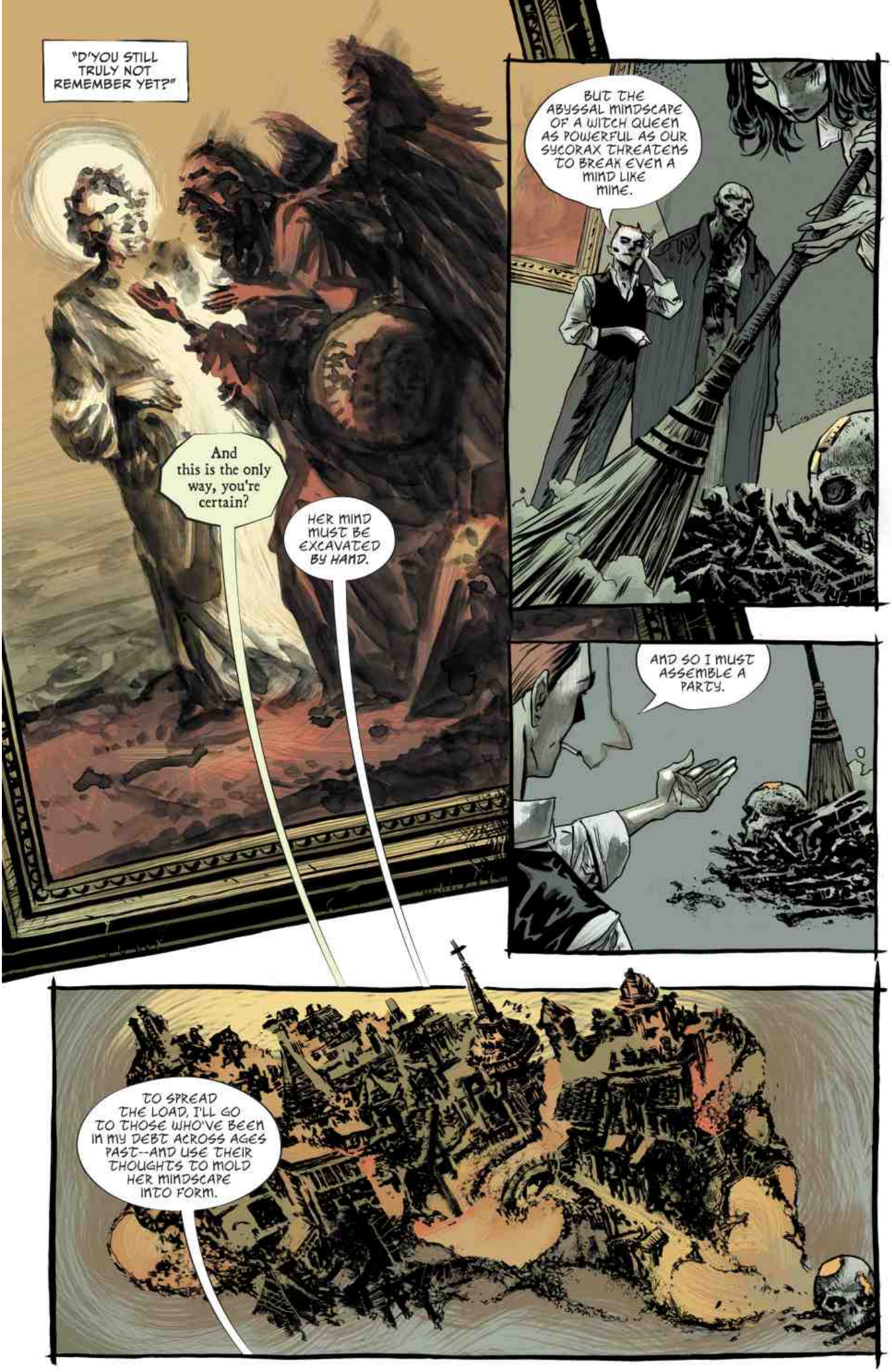
ANOTHER ONE?
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO HIM, YOU BASTARD?
OH, MY.
HE SAID HE HAD MAGIC IN HIS BLOOD. I'M SIMPLY SEARCHING EACH ARTERY, TRYING TO FIND IT.
PUHH-NNNY...

HE'S ALIVE? CAN--CAN YOU RESTORE HIM?
WHY?
HE'S MY COUSIN.
OH, IS HE? VERY WELL THEN.
HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO MAKE A DEAL?
OUR COVEN HERE HAS BECOME SLOPPY IN ITS WORK. THEY REQUIRE A THIRD OF THEIR KIND, AND YOU HAVE A SPARK OF POTENTIAL.
BUT, BUT I'M NOT--
YES YOU ARE, YOU KNOW FULL WELL YOU ARE. DON'T LIE TO US. WE'RE TOLD WE ARE PRINCE OF THOSE.
SO, YOU WILL JOIN THEIR NUMBER. YOU WILL LIVE YOUR LIFE IN SERVITUDE TO DUSTY BONES AND BLACK MAGICKS.
OR, YOU MAY WALK AWAY. HE CAN WORK OFF HIS OWN DEBT AS A FAMILIAR TO THESE WYRD SISTERS.
HIS LIFE WILL BE FAR MORE MISERABLE, FOR HE WILL NEVER BE THEIR EQUAL.
EITHER WAY, THEY GET THE HELP THEY NEED.
"THOUGH SHE WEPT, SHE ACCEPTED LUCIFER'S OFFER... AND HE BRANDED HER PSYCHICALLY, BINDING HER AS WE WERE TO SYCORAX.
"THEN SHE WENT TO COLLECT HER THINGS...AND TO SEVER THE NECESSARY TIES."
HI... JOHN?


HEY! PENNY IS THAT YOU?
I WAS REALLY, REALLY HOPING YOU'D CALL.
YOU WERE?
YEAH, I HAD A GREAT TIME THE OTHER NIGHT. I WAS REALLY HOPING YOU'D LET ME TAKE YOU OUT AGAIN.
I'M OUT OF TOWN... I'M GOING TO BE OUT OF TOWN FOR A VERY LONG TIME, I THINK.
GATELY HOUSE
AH.
RIGHT.
I REALLY AM...I WISH I WASN'T.
NO, NO, I UNDERSTAND...
WAS IT THE TRICK WITH THE MATCHSTICKS?
NO. I LIKED THE TRICK WITH THE MATCHES.
TO LIVE AGAIN
I KNEW IT WAS STUPID EVEN WHEN I WAS DOING IT. BUT I KEPT DOING IT ANYWAY.
IT WAS FUNNY.
WELL, IF YOU EVER ARE BACK IN TOWN... AND YOU LET ME TAKE YOU FOR DINNER...
I PROMISE TO LEAVE THE MATCHES AT HOME.
YOU KNOW WHAT? FUCK IT.
PICK ME UP AT SEVEN? TOMORROW?
REALLY?
"REALLY."
"AND SO SHE ABANDONED ME TO THAT HELLISH PLACE. FOR YOU."
"SHE RID HERSELF OF THE FOOL, LONG AFTER SHE SHOULD HAVE. REFUSED TO SACRIFICE HERSELF ANY LONGER FOR ANOTHER'S SINS."

"I'VE BEEN HERE EVER SINCE, HELPING THEM UPHOLD THE GLAMOUR THAT KEEPS GATELY HOUSE HIDDEN.
"SO WHEN HE CAME TO ME AS A WHISPER IN MY EAR, I WAS ONLY TOO EAGER TO HELP."
"TO GET MY REVENGE AGAINST THEM, AGAINST YOU AND PENELOPE, AND MOST OF ALL AGAINST LUCIFER...ALL THOSE WHO FORCED ME TO SUFFER."
STINGY JACK MADE ME SOME SWEET PROMISES. BUT EVEN HE COULDN'T HAVE FORESEEN THAT I'D GET TO PULL THIS TRIGGER.
KLK
D-DID YOU FORGET TO LOAD THIS?
I'M NOT VERY WELL. I'VE BEEN FORGETTING THINGS.
"SO THERE'S ANOTHER OUT THERE, BRANDED WITH MY NAME...
"WE WILL NEED THEM TO END THIS CHARADE. LUCIFER, FOOL THAT HE IS, BROUGHT SOMETHING TO THIS PLACE HE SHOULDN'T HAVE..."


I MUST FIND HIM BEFORE STINGY JACK DOES, AND MAKE LUCIFER UNDO IT ALL.
HOW DARE HE SEEK TO CONTROL MY DEATH?
S-STINGY JACK? YOU THINK HE MACHINATES HERE?
OH, DEAR.
WHAT?
WE, UH... WE WERE WITH HIM WHEN WE SAW YOUR STATUE. IT WAS HE WHO SUGGESTED WE COME HERE, WHILE HE COMFORTED LUCIFER.
"A DISTRACTION."
ALL THIS IS CALIBAN'S FAULT. I SWEAR TO YOU, BLAKE. HE'LL PAY FOR YOUR SUFFERING.
HE'LL PAY FOR SENDING US HERE.
AH, LUCIFER...
CALIBAN SENT YOU NOWHERE.
YOU BROUGHT US ALL HERE, CHEERFULLY ENOUGH...


"D'YOU STILL TRULY NOT REMEMBER YET?"
And this is the only way, you're certain?
HER MIND MUST BE EXCAVATED BY HAND.
BUT THE ABYSSAL MINDSCAPE OF A WITCH QUEEN AS POWERFUL AS OUR SYCORAX THREATENS TO BREAK EVEN A MIND LIKE MINE.
AND SO I MUST ASSEMBLE A PARTY.
TO SPREAD THE LOAD, I'LL GO TO THOSE WHO'VE BEEN IN MY DEBT ACROSS AGES PAST--AND USE THEIR THOUGHTS TO MOLD HER MINDSCAPE INTO FORM.

DON'T FORGET ME, LUCIFER, WHO YOU CROSSED. YOU LEFT ME IN THIS STATE OF LIVING DEATH.
I'LL JOIN YOU THERE...
... I'LL TRAVEL BY YOUR SIDE.
IT'S ONLY FAIR YOU GRANT ME MY OWN WORLD.
I'LL MAKE SURE NONE OF US CAN EVER LEAVE.
I'm SORRY, DID YOU SPEAK?
I didn't, no.
I THOUGHT I HEARD...
FORGET IT. NO MATTER.

To Be Continued

Lucifer

"THE PECULIAR CASE OF THE MAN ON THE BATHROOM FLOOR"

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Curated for THE SANDMAN UNIVERSE by Neil Gaiman

NEXT ISSUE:
THE MAN WHO BESTED THE DEVIL, NOT ONCE BUT TWICE

A lantern is lit. A vessel is purloined. And Caliban plays with his dollies.

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SON OF ULTRON